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Pecos freeway plan a short-term mess

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The Arizona Republic
Dec. 1, 2006 12:00 AM

Ahwatukee Foothills streets will be temporarily flooded by cars if the proposed South Mountain Freeway is built along Pecos Road because construction work will take the heavily traveled thoroughfare out of commission for several years.

But the same analysis, done by Phoenix's street transportation director, predicts a brighter long-term effect: a decrease in local traffic by 2030 on at least some street segments.

For example, the 22-mile, \$1.7 billion freeway eventually will reduce the number of cars making daily trips along Chandler Boulevard between Desert Foothills Parkway and 24th Street by 2,200, the study found.

Conversely, the number of vehicles on the same stretch would actually increase by 7,800 if the freeway were not built, officials say.

Critics aren't buying that analysis and question why traffic projections on other local feeder streets such as Liberty Lane weren't taken into account.

Liberty runs roughly parallel to Pecos Road on the southern edge of Ahwatukee.

"That would be the cut-through," said Doug Cole, president of the Lakewood Community Association and chairman of the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee. "It's a minor collector between 24th and 32nd streets, so you can make an argument that would throw a lot of traffic on Liberty Lane."

Cole and other members of the committee want a more thorough analysis of the street traffic impacts. The Arizona Department of Transportation is expected to include some of that data in its draft Environmental Impact Statement, which is due in April.

Don Herp, deputy street transportation director for Phoenix, said his analysis doesn't include Liberty Lane because the estimates are based on data from the Maricopa Association of Governments.

"The traffic model used by MAG doesn't include anything smaller than an arterial street," Herp said.

Chandler Boulevard is considered an arterial street, but Liberty isn't. But Cole argued that those minor streets would also be hit with a major impact, especially as motorists drop off and pick up children, spouses and others at area schools.

Herp disagrees, saying the freeway is "not going to affect the school traffic."

More than 88,000 residents live in Ahwatukee, according to a 2005 estimate by the U.S. Census. Residents face daily traffic woes commuting to downtown Phoenix and elsewhere and rely heavily on Interstate 10 to get to other parts of the Valley. "Traffic is a major issue in Ahwatukee Foothills," said Phoenix City Councilman Greg Stanton, who represents the area and requested the analysis in February. Stanton is opposed to building the freeway along Pecos Road, and says it will generate truck

traffic, pollution and noise. In addition, it would mean razing more than 220 homes in the proposed freeway's path.

"I'm concerned about that, the impact on local traffic if this thing gets built on Pecos Road," he said.

Recently, the Gila River Indian Community Council raised the possibility of building the freeway on the reservation, which abuts Pecos Road.

Its governing council passed a resolution establishing a transportation team to plan and develop thoroughfares, including the South Mountain Freeway and the widening of I-10, through the reservation.

But if an agreement isn't struck and Pecos Road remains the preferred alignment, motorists will have to find ways to drive through Ahwatukee without using the street.

Unlike construction of Loop 101 through Tempe and Chandler, in which Price Road remained an access road, the proposed South Mountain Freeway would make Pecos Road unusable until construction is completed in 2015.

ADOT, working with the Federal Highways Administration, expects to decide whether to build the freeway and where late next year.

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